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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2922  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2307  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000530

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: A RAMP TOO FAR? KYRGYZ OFFER SOME INSIGHTS INTO  
DECISION TO TURN DOWN U.S. PROPOSAL

REF: BISHKEK 499

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Classified By: Charge Lee Litzenberger, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a May 23 meeting, Kyrgyz Security Council Deputy Secretary informed Charge that the Kyrgyz decision to disapprove the U.S. proposal to invest \$30 million to construct a strategic parking ramp at Manas Airport for use by coalition forces was final, and the decision had been taken by the full cabinet. The Kyrgyz specifically claimed that FM Karabayev and Defense Minister Isakov, both of whom had denied knowledge of the decision to the Ambassador, were full participants in the decision. Security Council officials cited three main reasons for rejecting the proposal: the December 2006 shooting incident in which a Kyrgyz truck driver was killed by a U.S. security forces airman; concerns about environmental damage caused by the base; and concerns over "dual ownership" of the ramp. They declined to elaborate further, but stressed that Kyrgyzstan continues to support the base and seeks to continue bilateral security cooperation with the United States. They urged the U.S. to consider identifying an alternative use of the funding for the ramp -- for example to support law enforcement, communications, the medical sector or other infrastructure projects -- and pledged to work with us on such an alternative project. Charge explained the surprise and disappointment of the U.S. with the decision, which he noted was difficult to understand given the many significant economic benefits of the project to Kyrgyzstan precisely at a time when it desperately needs to stimulate the economy and create jobs. End Summary.

Security Council Offers Meeting on Ramp  
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¶2. (C) On May 23, Charge and Army Attache met with NSC Deputy Secretary Bakirov, NSC Advisor LTG (Ret.) Mamyrkulov, and NSC staffer Kurmanbekov, at Bakirov's request, to "share ideas and discuss" the Kyrgyz response to the U.S. proposal to invest \$30 million to construct a strategic parking ramp.

(Note. On May 13, the NSC informed the Embassy by phone of the government's decision against the project; on May 21 the Embassy received formal notification of the decision under cover of a diplomatic note. See Reftel for details. End Note.)

#### Can U.S. Redirect Funds to Another Project?

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13. (C) Bakirov opened the meeting by stressing that the decision conveyed to the Embassy that the proposed project would be "inexpedient" was a collective decision taken by 23 members of the Kyrgyz Government based on full interagency discussion of the issue. He said Kyrgyz authorities would now suggest that the U.S. consider a "new" program, like projects currently underway under IMET, FMF and EXBS programs. Bakirov suggested allocating the money proposed for the strategic ramp for "a different purpose," such as "law enforcement, infrastructure, or communications."

#### U.S. Surprise, Disappointment with Decision

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14. (C) Charge thanked Bakirov for his clarification, but conveyed the surprise and disappointment of the U.S. with this decision. He noted that the ramp proposal was conceived as a non-controversial economic investment project that would benefit the Kyrgyz side as well as coalition operations. Our understanding from Kyrgyz interlocutors involved in the interagency deliberations on the project was that, while some government entities had raised objections, several key ministries supported the project, including MFA and MOD, who anticipated a positive decision. The U.S. was further

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puzzled when, in subsequent meetings, FM Karabayev and MinDef Isakov told the Ambassador they were unaware of a decision on the matter and both also seemed only vaguely aware of the economic magnitude of the project.

15. (C) The Charge explained that we were concerned that the decision may have been made without full appreciation of the economic and strategic benefits of the proposal. He explained that the project in no way implied the U.S. was seeking a permanent base; the terms of the bilateral agreement, which allows either side to terminate the understanding, would remain unchanged. Second, it did not represent an expansion of the base -- the ramp would be used to relocate existing coalition aircraft from the center of the airport to a more remote and secure site at the northern edge of the airport. In so doing, it would relieve traffic congestion between coalition and civilian aircraft, enhancing the safe operations of both. In addition, by freeing up the space currently occupied by coalition aircraft, the project would remove the need for aircraft to taxi up the take-off runway. This would also significantly enhance airport operations and allow for increased traffic. Economically, the U.S. estimates that \$15-20 million would be contracted through local Kyrgyz firms, significantly boosting the economy and adding significant numbers of new jobs in the area. Finally, once the mission of the base was complete, the ramp would remain as a major economic asset for the airport, and a strategic asset for the country.

#### Security Council Outlines Decision Process

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16. (C) Security Council Advisor Mamyrkulov then attempted to explain in detail the bureaucratic process leading up to the decision. He said that former First Deputy Minister of Defense Oruzbayev chaired two interagency meetings of the intergovernmental commission that oversees base issues, where all aspects of the proposal were discussed. Following this, the NSC chaired two interagency meetings. At these meetings, ministries took positions for and against the proposal. Mamyrkulov confirmed that MOD and MFA supported the ramp,

citing the economic benefits involved. "Three to four agencies" raised objections, which Mamyrkulov said centered on three issues: the December 2006 shooting incident in which a U.S. airman killed a Kyrgyz truck driver; environmental concerns; and coalition (vice airport) control of the ramp. Mamyrkulov said the interagency group sent forward a recommendation to the government. He claimed the government, under PM Chudinov, deliberated and decided the issue. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense participated in this process. Once the decision was taken, the Prime Minister tasked the NSC to transmit the decision to the U.S.

#### Scant Details on How Decision Reached

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17. (C) The Charge responded that while this information was helpful, it did not explain how the government concluded that the concerns raised outweighed the substantial economic benefits of the project. If they could elaborate on the concerns, perhaps we could find ways to address them. Bakirov and Mamyrkulov replied that they had provided a detailed review of the process, were not part of the government led by PM Chudinov, and had nothing further to offer. Bakirov noted that there were never any guarantees that the decision would be positive, and urged the U.S. to move beyond this issue and not politicize it. They said that Kyrgyzstan supports the global war on terrorism and was prepared to continue the cooperation we have established.

18. (C) Comment. Bakirov and his staff were clearly uncomfortable during the meeting, and Bakirov especially

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seemed displeased with being tapped to explain the bad news. Mamyrkulov's outline of the process glossed over how the actual decision was made, and did not resolve the contradiction that both FM Karabayev and DefMin Isakov seemed genuinely ill-informed about the matter or even the fact that a decision had been made. The NSC may not actually have the inside details of the decision; in any event they were clearly not comfortable going beyond their brief in a group meeting. There was no hint of outside considerations -- e.g. Russia -- as an additional factor, but the lack of transparency in the decision, the reluctance to explain how it was reached, and earlier indications that the GKNB opposed the project all point in that direction. Although Bakirov presented the decision as final, we will continue to seek clarification of the process.

LITZENBERGER